

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

news release

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LEOPARD AND CLOUDED LEOPARD SURVEY ORDERED

The leopard and clouded leopard are to be the subjects of two separate surveys announced in the Federal Register recently by the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Both surveys are designed to determine if the animals should be listed as endangered or threatened species.

Public comments are invited. Any persons with factual information, including publications and written reports concerning these two animals, should submit them to the Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington, D.C. 20240, before July 21, 1975.

The Department of the Interior is seeking the views of governments of all countries in which the leopard and clouded leopard occur.

In 1972 the Department of the Interior declared the leopard (Panthera pardus) to be an endangered species throughout its natural range, primarily because of commercial exploitation which brought about a serious decline in the numbers and distribution of the animal. This designation as endangered ended the legal importation of leopards and their skins into the United States.

Scientific evidence accumulated since 1972 suggests that the leopard may not be endangered throughout its entire range. Sufficient evidence is now on hand in the Department of the Interior to warrant a review of the leopard to determine whether it should be reclassified as a threatened species in any part of its range. This would allow some legal exploitation of the animal.

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This species of leopard has the greatest range of any big cat. Found throughout most of Africa and Asia, it inhabits a variety of regions from tropical forests and rocky areas with heavy or scattered vegetation to the high, cold regions of the Himalayas. Coloration is cinnamon-buff with a rosette pattern. The "black panther" is a color phase of this species. In rocky areas the leopard lives in caves. In forested regions it lives in dense vegetation. The leopard is active and agile in trees, often springing on its prey from overhanging limbs. It usually travels in pairs, but sometimes family groups of four to six are noted.

The clouded leopard (Neofelis nebulosa) is not currently listed as either threatened or endangered. This cat is a smaller relative of the leopard and recent evidence accumulated indicates this species may have declined to a point where its survival is in jeopardy. A review of its status is therefore believed warranted to determine if it should be listed as threatened or endangered.

The clouded leopard is found only in Asia. It resides in Nepal and Sikkim eastward to southern China, Hainan and Formosa, Indochina, and Borneo. It frequents jungles and shrub and swampy areas.

The review of both of these leopards will consider all factors that may affect them, such as legal and illegal hunting, fur trapping and exporting, government regulations and enforcement, local and national attitudes, commercial and economic pressures, availability of prey species, depredations on livestock, expansion of human population, habitat destruction, and environmental alteration.

When the review of each species is completed, a proposed rulemaking concerning the results of the survey will be made in the Federal Register. The public will, once again, be invited to comment at that time.